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ABSTRACT

This guide, the second in a series of three, explains step-by-step the decisions that must be made to find, evaluate, and hire a quality superintendent of schools. Chapter 1 describes the steps for proper planning, which can also offer the opportunity to review and reorder the board's priorities. Subsequent chapters deal with recruitment and selection of superintendents and expectations of both the board and the superintendent. The final chapters offer suggestions on how to retain a superintendent as well as sample timelines for hiring and a news release. (Author/LD)

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Superintendent Career Development Series No. 2

Selecting a Superintendent

A Joint Publication of the American Association of School Administrators and the National School Boards Association

EA 012 193

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Guidelines for the Preparation of School Administrators

Selecting a Superintendent

The Superintendent's Contract

Compensating the Superintendent (Summary Report)

The Administrative Leadership Team

Evaluating the Superintendent

A full report on **Compensating the Superintendent** is also available through the American Association of School Administrators

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Foreword

Each year, school boards in communities across America are faced with the task of hiring a new superintendent. Some say the selection of a superintendent is the most crucial decision a board must face.

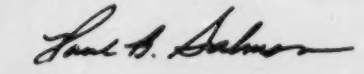
When, for one reason or another, the chief executive officer of a school system decides to leave, the board is left with the task of finding the right person to take the reins.

Occasionally, the right person has been waiting in the wings. But more often than not, a systematic search must be undertaken. Knowing the steps in that search can save time and lead the board to the best candidates to meet the needs of a particular community.

There are also benefits for the prospective superintendent. A school board that is well organized for selection of its chief executive will be better able to articulate its needs and hopes to candidates for the position.

Since the process of selecting a superintendent is an essential ingredient in the life of a school system and the career of the administrator, AASA commissioned the writing of this publication. The manuscript was then reviewed, modified and approved by a Joint AASA-NSBA Committee. The result is a publication including the views of both administrators and board members.

Selecting a Superintendent will serve as a guidebook for school districts across the nation faced with the important task of selecting a new chief executive.



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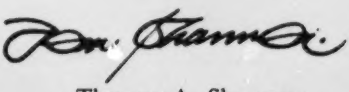

Thomas A. Shannon
Executive Director
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Association

Preface

"As public education has become more and more complex, its management has become more and more difficult. Greater skills are required for the successful management of today's schools. Nothing that the board does is more important than employing and retaining a professionally prepared and dedicated superintendent."

The year was 1968. The thoughts were those jointly expressed by the American Association of School Administrators and the National School Boards Association. More than a decade later the words still hold true. Selecting a superintendent is perhaps the most critical decision a school board has to make.

Today the selection of a superintendent has become even more complex. School boards must consider many additional factors when employing a chief executive officer for the school system. History has written new chapters into the life of the superintendent which boards must consider when making employment decisions.

As we move into the 1980's, a superintendent is expected to provide increased leadership in the learning process, become even more student oriented, face taxpayers' revolts which directly conflict with the first two goals, deal with mandated funding reforms, declining enrollments and test scores, new mandates for the handicapped, full-scale involvement of the courts in school governance, competency-based testing, "back to basics," women's rights and Title IX, even collective bargaining by members of the management team.

In short, the duties of the superintendent of schools continue to become more complex, more challenging, more exhausting, more diversified and more precarious as society and our schools head quickly toward the 21st century.

What should a board do when its administrative leader must be replaced? How should it go about the task of selecting a superintendent of schools, a superintendent who can work closely with today's problems and tomorrow's still unknown complexities? These are probably the most significant questions a school board must address because the superintendent, as the change agent of the school board, is responsible for implementing the board's policy decisions. The school board's selection of the superintendent will be a major factor in the success or failure of the board in governing the public schools.

That is what this book is all about. It covers, step by step, the decisions that must be made in finding, evaluating and hiring a quality superintendent. It discusses the successes, and the failures, of school districts throughout the country as they strive for excellence in administrative leadership. And it reveals the rare opportunity a school board has, while looking for a new superintendent, to also look at goals, priorities and the entire educational thrust of the school system.

Chapter 1

FIRST STEP:

A Plan

The first, critical step in selecting a superintendent of schools is to develop a plan. A well conceived systematic procedure for choosing a chief school administrator is needed.

There is no substitute for proper planning. Quick decisions can lead to trouble especially if they are made without proper deliberation and consideration of many critical questions.

Hiring a new superintendent gives the board a rare opportunity to review and reorder the board's priorities. It offers an opportunity for change, if change is needed. In changing administrative leadership, the school district's philosophy, its image, its entire educational perspective also can be changed. And that change can usually take place without confrontation, hurt feelings or diminished self esteem on the part of the board or the superintendent. Changes can be achieved in a rational, systematic way, based on the board's perception of the school district's needs.

There are many steps in a good plan for choosing a superintendent. Here are a few for your consideration.

Examine Goals . . . Priorities

Take a long, hard look at the goals and priorities of the school system. Determine what changes, if any, should be made. Talk with community leaders, school district staff, parents, and stu-

dents. Determine the school district's future needs. Then determine the kind of person needed to meet them.

Does the system need:

- Revitalization, innovation, a new thrust to pump life into a system that has experienced a period of retrogression?
- A more conservative bearing perhaps to restore an even keel to a system too long buffeted by the winds of change?
- A person who will maintain a successful status quo?

Once these questions are answered, the board will have a clearer picture of the kind of person it wants to guide the school system in the years ahead.

Develop a Time Line

Determine when you want a new superintendent on the job. Then work back from that point. Realize that there will be a lot of ground to cover. Make sure you leave yourself plenty of time—six months to a year—unless you already have a particularly strong candidate in mind and his or her election by the board is a mere formality.

Develop Criteria for Selection

Develop criteria for selection of a new superintendent. Envision the kind of person you want. Include experience, management style, personal traits, communication skills. List the things you would like to see in a superintendent. That list will be a big help to you or to your consultant in hiring the right person.*

**The use of consultants is described later in this chapter.*

Hiring—Inside or Outside

Decide up front whether you are going to hire from within the system, conduct a search for candidates outside the system, or both. It's an important decision. If you have your mind made up already because there is an outstanding candidate from within the district ready to step into the superintendency, don't undertake the charade of a nationwide search. It's costly. It's demeaning to the person you want in the first place. And it almost certainly will be exposed for what it is . . . a charade.

The decision to hire from within is a delicate one. On the one hand, the board must protect the school district against provincialism, complacency, stagnation, and politics. On the other hand, a board must reward superior service with promotion if it wants to maintain staff enthusiasm and morale.

One factor that must be watched closely when hiring from within is the existence of federal guidelines concerning the promotion of women and minorities. If a case can be made that an equally qualified woman or minority candidate for the superintendency has been passed over in favor of someone else, the selection could be effectively challenged under guidelines from the U.S. Office of Civil Rights and Title IX.

As part of the superintendent selection procedure, school boards should seek legal advice concerning guidelines.

The board should systematically review the qualifications of local staff to see which ones meet the criteria set forth for the new superintendent, determine which ones are candidates or potential candidates, and make a selection from that group if the consensus of the board is to hire from within.

Often, deciding whether to hire from within or conduct an outside search has to be a judgment call by the board. While there is no rule of thumb that applies all the time, boards seeking to maintain a status quo should look first within the school district to find a qualified person familiar with operations. Similarly, boards looking for a change should look for new blood from outside the system.

Consultant Vs. Do It Yourself

If an extensive search is to be conducted outside the school system, the board must decide whether to do the searching itself or to hire a consultant. The board may choose a combination of the two approaches.

Impartial consultants can be helpful. They can help the board assess the needs of the school district and suggest the type of person to best meet these needs.

Lists

Good consultants also have access to state and national lists of qualified superintendent candidates. Some lists even describe specific qualifications for boards interested in a superintendent with strength in one specific area of administration.

Also, a consultant can spend the needed time and energy on the details of a proper search. A board, on the other hand, must face other critical concerns at the same time it is looking for a superintendent.

Many boards searching for new superintendents have found that a top-notch consultant is essential to assure a really impartial search. They contend that qualified advisers can serve as recruiters for outstanding candidates who may otherwise never know about the vacancy.

But beware: some consultants have lists of prospective superintendents they try to foist upon school boards without doing an extensive search. Thus, boards should be wary of any consultant's "stable" of administrative talent compiled and ready to be peddled. While such tactics appear less frequently than in the past, they still exist.

Qualifications of a Consultant

Boards should thoroughly research the consultant's professional reputation. The consultant's reputation must be above reproach. The consultant must have proven ability to maintain strict confidentiality, to adhere to high ethical standards, to be totally impartial, and to be unaffected by local power blocks that may try to influence the process of finding a new superintendent.

One good method for selecting a consultant is to ask for a proposal spelling out exactly what services will be offered, the time line involved and the cost. This approach should provide several consultant proposals for comparison.

Consultants also should be able to demonstrate to the board their full knowledge of school administration, their familiarity with state and local requirements for the superintendency, their experience in consultation with other school districts, their access to sources of superintendents (such as colleges, universities and administrative search organizations) and their willingness to cooperate fully with the wishes of the board.

References should be required and checked out thoroughly. And prospective consultants should be interviewed by the board before any choice is made.

Role of the Consultant

The board also must decide what services it wishes the consultants to perform and what

functions it wishes to carry out itself.

- Some boards prefer to be guided by a competent consultant every step of the way, from the initial phase of determining the school system's future goals and priorities through the hiring of a new superintendent.

- Others use consultants only for talent search purposes, for interviewing and narrowing down the initial list of candidates, or for the final selection process.

There is no "best" method. The choice is up to individual boards to determine in meeting the needs of the school district and the wishes of board members.

In the process of selecting a consultant, some boards act as a committee of the whole; others designate a committee of the board to conduct the search. It is recommended, however, that boards act as a committee of the whole.

A Performance Contract

It is also recommended that in hiring a consultant, a "performance" contract be established. The consultant's duties should be clearly spelled out. The contract should include a statement that the full, agreed-upon fee be paid only after all steps have been completed to the satisfaction of the board. Again, legal counsel should be sought in agreeing to any contract.

Finally, contracts with consultants should contain a "self-destruct" clause terminating the consultant's involvement with the school district when his or her work is completed. Usually, the work is done when the consultant presents a list of candidates to the board and makes recommendations on respective qualities and caliber. The "self-destruct" clause assures that the con-

sultant will not be involved in the selection process itself which is the task of the board and the board alone.

Schools boards seeking a consultant can readily obtain guidance and advice on the selection of such a person from colleges of education, from state administrator or school boards associations, the American Association of School Administrators or the National School Boards Association.

Develop a Good Plan

With or without a consultant, a school board still must put together a systematic blueprint and timeline for selecting a new superintendent. Among the questions that must be considered are those involving the role of the board, the staff, students, parents, local business and industry, and community organizations.

A Community Advisory Committee

First question: whether or not to use a community advisory committee. It is naturally a sensitive issue. Most community leaders close to the schools would welcome a chance to help name a new superintendent. They would applaud the courage of the board in appointing such a committee. Yet, realistically, community advisory committees can present problems. For instance, what would happen if the board appointed a blue ribbon community advisory committee, the committee unanimously agreed on a candidate, and the board for its own good reasons said "no?"

One rule of thumb: If a school district has used community advisory committees for such things as budgets or curriculum selection and they have worked satisfactorily, it would be wise to consider the same process in selecting a superintendent. At least it might be well to con-

sider using an advisory committee in developing criteria for selection. On the other hand, selecting a superintendent of schools may not be the best situation for launching an experimental community advisory committee.

A good compromise might be to ask all community groups active in the affairs of the schools to submit statements indicating what they would like to see in a new superintendent. The board might then use these statements in developing criteria for the position.

It is critical, however, that whatever method of community involvement is used, the board should spell out beforehand the specifics of that involvement. Whether the community is involved in actual selection or just developing criteria for selection, it must be clear to all concerned that the board, and only the board, has the final say.

Staff-Student Involvement

The same holds true when involving students, administrators or other employees in the selection process. If it is the policy of the board to deal with student organizations and employee groups in making important policy decisions, it should also be the policy to consult these groups in selecting a new superintendent. Yet, it must again be clear from the start that the board has the final say.

In reality, however, planned involvement rarely will deter students and employee organizations from making suggestions in the selection process. Both groups should be consulted as the board evaluates future goals and objectives prior to selecting a new superintendent. They should also be given an opportunity to suggest the qualities they most desire in a new superintendent.

A wise board leaves no stone unturned in its search for advice on the selection of an ideal chief executive.

If the school board decides to solicit recommendations or suggestions from advisory committees, it should stress that membership on those committees will be open ended and not restricted. Everyone interested should have an opportunity to express an opinion.

The Board's Role in Selection

Next, the board should decide on its own role in the selection process. Should the board act as a committee of the whole? Or should it appoint a subcommittee to coordinate the search? The answer in most cases is: the board should act as a committee of the whole.

The process of selecting a new superintendent is one of the most important decisions a board has to make. Therefore, every member should be involved from the beginning because every member will have to live with the selection once it is made. Obviously, the more people involved, the more difficult it will be to come up with a final slate of candidates. But once that slate is selected, no board member should be able to contend that he or she did not have a full say in the selection process.

Consider a Screening Committee

Should the school board use a screening committee? Many boards often do use screening committees composed of retired educational administrators or professors of educational administration from nearby colleges and universities to recruit candidates and handle the time-consuming task of reviewing resumes, making telephone inquiries and conducting personal interviews.

Again, recruitment of candidates for the superintendency is an important part of the selection process. Many well qualified prospects may apply only if the opportunity is brought to their attention by someone who can tell them, objectively, what to expect in a particular school district. The candidate will probably trust an impartial observer more than a person who is closely associated with the district.

Two limitations, however, must be made clear to any screening committee. First, the role of the committee is to conduct initial screenings, to weed out the obviously unqualified applicants, and to compile proper information and data on qualified candidates. Second, the school board, not the screening committee, will determine the final list of candidates to be interviewed. The board will also make the final selection of a new superintendent.

A representative of the board, or a committee of representatives, should serve on the screening committee along with the professionals. If a consultant is selected, he or she should be included in the screening committee.

Depending upon the degree of community involvement preferred by the board, other members of the screening committee might include parents, community or business leaders. Again, do not restrict committee membership.

Policy Statement Needed

Once the selection process is defined the board must develop a policy statement spelling out the respective roles of the board and the superintendent of schools. Few things can destroy the initiative, morale and effectiveness of a school system or its superintendent more than repeated intrusions by the school board into administra-

tive matters. Separating policy matters from administration isn't easy. But it has to be done if the right person is to be attracted and retained. Naturally, the two areas are bound to overlap, particularly with the increasing complexities of today's education. This overlap can be handled easily by a well written policy implemented by a competent superintendent and a confident school board. A competent superintendent must know from the beginning that the board trusts his or her ability to run the schools without constant intrusion into the day-to-day administration of the school system.

Agree to Reach Agreement

Agree to Agree. Trying to get five or seven or nine persons of divergent viewpoints, personalities, persuasions and constituencies to agree on any one matter, particularly one as important as the selection of a superintendent, is no easy task. But few top-flight candidates for the superintendency will take the job unless assured a unanimous or nearly unanimous appointment by the board.

Some boards agree to continue the search until all agree on one choice. While this approach may not always be possible, there are few high quality candidates who will accept an appointment as superintendent by a vote of 5-4.

Evaluating the Candidates

Determine evaluation procedures. Again, a plan for evaluating candidates must be accepted ahead of time. Each board member should be able to evaluate, independently of other board members, each candidate interviewed. Otherwise, one or two board members might unduly influence the thinking of others.

It is often best to develop a standard, uniform

rating sheet. This rating system enables each board member to evaluate predetermined considerations such as instructional background, educational philosophy, interpersonal relations, management skills, knowledge of finance, sincerity, leadership potential, personnel practices, appearance, alertness and the like. A scale of one to five is often used for this type of rating.

Evaluation without a system rarely works; evaluation by oral consensus is evaluation by peer persuasion. All candidates who are interviewed should have an equal chance. They should be able to answer the same types of questions on the same subjects. Only in this systematic way can a valid comparison be drawn among final candidates.

Proper preparation for interviews by members of the board is essential. The only way to prepare properly is to plan the entire process in advance.

Strict Time Lines Needed

Set a strict time line for the selection process. Don't drag it out. Regular board conferences, meetings and other duties take a lot of time. Those activities continue even during the critical months when a new superintendent is being sought. If these regular duties prolong the selection process, the entire school district may suffer from a lack of leadership and direction. Good candidates may bow out of the race, and in the end, the board may have to make a hurried decision that it will later regret.

Specific timetables should be established for announcing the vacancy, accepting applications, screening, selecting final candidates, interviewing them, making a selection, and getting the new superintendent on the job.

These timetables will vary widely depending on the scope of the recruitment and selection process. Consultants, familiar with the time it takes to complete the various phases of a search for a superintendent, could be helpful in recommending a workable timetable.

Set a Budget

A search costs money, from a few hundred to $10,000 or more. Costs may include consultant fees, travel and telephone expenses for consultants, travel for finalists who will be interviewed, travel expenses for board members to visit the finalists' home communities, postage, secretarial services, costs of job announcement flyers or brochures and legal fees to draw up a superintendent's contract.

The size of the budget will vary with the number of consultants, the number of candidates to be interviewed and the range of the search.

Work with the Media

Deal openly and frankly with the news media. Make complete announcements regarding each step. Make announcements about the vacancy, the search process, the use of consultants, the screening committee, the degree of community involvement, the time line, the cost and the qualities you are looking for in a new superintendent.

The more the community is informed, the more support the selection process and ultimately the new superintendent will receive. On the other hand, if you keep the public in the dark, the process and the new superintendent may not enjoy citizen support.

Chapter 2

RECRUITING:

Finding the Right Person For the Job

Once the recruitment process has been thoroughly and systematically planned, it is time to start the search.

Announce the Vacancy

Make the announcement through news releases, brochures and letters to school of educational placement officers, chief state school officers, professional education associations, university staff members, other school districts and other individuals and organizations recommended as possible sources of applicants for the superintendency.

A brochure, or a comprehensive flyer, is important. It should contain:

- a description of the community and the school district
- a complete job description for the vacant position
- professional qualifications required
- demands on personal time
- salary range
- termination benefits
- the application procedure.

The publication should be scrupulously accurate in its description of the school district and the community. Yet it should be a promotional

piece intended to sell the district to top-flight educators as a desirable place to live and work. The format should be bright and positive. The layout, if funds permit, should be done professionally.

If you are serious about an extensive search for the best person available, a good, widely circulated brochure may attract someone who otherwise would not have applied if the announcement were only a few lines in a professional journal.

If you use consultants or a search team, they will be able to recommend the proper brochure. If not, samples of recruitment brochures can be obtained from other school districts or from professional organizations. Again, distribution depends on the scope and range of the search.

Organizing a Screening Committee

Simultaneous with the announcement of the vacancy, develop a screening committee. This committee can consist of college and university professionals skilled in such searches, members of professional organizations at the national or state level, retired public school administrators, former superintendents, or any combination thereof. Or, it can consist of a committee of the board, or the board as a committee of the whole.

The committee should have the full confidence of the board to screen out unqualified applicants and to recommend a small list of not more than ten or twelve persons for final consideration by the board.

A well planned, well executed search usually results in hundreds of applications. Therefore, it is recommended that the board use a screening committee of outside professionals. The task of

thoroughly checking out applications, resumes and references can be long and tedious and may divert the board from other duties it must perform while the search is underway.

Of course, if the search is a limited one and the applicants are few, the board itself can handle the screening process. But any sizable search calls for a special screening committee.

If the board uses a screening committee, it must be sure the committee understands the kind of persons the board wants for the job. It is advisable for the board to meet with the screening committee to describe and interpret the criteria that have been established for the search.

Also, since the screening committee must make initial judgments for the board, it is important that communications between the committee and the board be frequent and clear.

The board and screening committee must maintain total confidentiality. Names of candidates must be kept in strictest confidence. Leading candidates for many positions have been lost because word "leaked out" back home that they were seeking a position elsewhere. This situation can be embarrassing to an administrator climbing the superintendent's career ladder and may force him or her to reconsider. Many candidates will not apply unless assured confidentiality.

Receive the Screening Committee Report

When the screening committee is ready to report its list of candidates, the board should meet with the committee in executive session, unless open meeting laws mandate otherwise. At the meeting, the board should receive a list of three to twelve recommendations, depending upon the size of the search and the number of

qualified applicants. Again, confidentiality is essential.

The committee should not rank the final candidates. Instead, the candidates should be presented alphabetically with a brief report about the outstanding qualifications of each.

Upon receiving the recommendations, the board should ask any questions, and discuss each candidate with the committee.

Once board members feel they have enough information about recommended candidates, the board should select from three to six finalists to be interviewed by the board.

Chapter 3

MAKING A SELECTION:

Time for a Decision

Once the finalists have been determined, the most critical part of the process is at hand: the interview.

Review Screening Committee Report

First each board member should review the screening committee report and the background of each candidate.

The Pre-Interview Session

The board should hold a pre-interview session to agree upon the process and structure of interviews, the areas to be covered, the time and length of interview, the place, and role of board members.

The board should agree on who is to contact the prospective candidates by telephone, requesting confirmation in writing.

It is recommended that all interviews be held within as short a time span as possible—not more than two weeks. Each interview should last at least an hour, preferably two or more. Interviews should not be scheduled "back to back."

Some boards find it helpful to schedule interviews during lunch or dinner to lessen the formality of the occasion, to put the candidate at ease, and to get a better look at his or her personality and style.

It is also recommended that each candidate be told that board members may wish to visit his or

her community to talk with others about qualifications and conduct on the job. This visit may mean the end of confidentiality. Therefore, candidates should be allowed to give or deny permission for these visits. Boards are encouraged to use caution in visiting a candidate's community.

In addition, the board should be familiar with state open meeting "sunshine" laws. Counsel should determine the applicability of these laws to the interview process.

The Interview—Two-Way Street

An interview with a prospective superintendent should be a two-way street. It should allow the board to assess the candidate and the candidate to assess the board.

A candidate who will take the job without asking penetrating questions about it, particularly questions about board-superintendent relations, probably will not be the best candidate. A good candidate will ask for assurances of a free hand in shaping his or her management priorities, in forming a management team and in making management decisions. If a good candidate does not feel that a satisfactory working relationship can be developed between the superintendent and the board, he or she will probably decide not to take the job, even if it is offered.

Besides helping the board select a new superintendent, the interview also offers the candidate the following opportunities:

- It gives the candidate a chance to explore the goals, priorities and problems of the school district and to match the job potential against his or her career goals.
- It provides an opportunity for the candidate to

assess the caliber of the board members as individuals and to evaluate the working relationships between the board and its superintendent.

The interview also gives the board the opportunity to explore the professional qualifications, goals and ideals of the candidate and to note his or her personal interests, assets and expectations. All are important factors in the selection of a new superintendent.

Interview Questions

Questions that generally will elicit helpful information for the board are:

- What criteria would you use in evaluating an educational program?
- What major problems have you faced in your present or previous administrative positions? How did you solve these problems?
- How have you improved the school system now under your direction?
- How would you improve the abilities of a professional staff?
- Have you been successful in gaining support from voters for levies and bond issues?
- What is your concept of the role of the board and of the superintendent?
- How would you keep the public informed of the work of the school system?
- What do you consider to be your greatest assets and abilities? How about your weaknesses?

Other more specific questions include:

- During your first year as superintendent, how might you go about determining the strengths and weaknesses of this district?
- The board feels that two (three, four) major

problems confronting this district are . . . How would you deal with each of these problems?

- In addition to handling these problems, the board would like the superintendent to undertake the following projects . . . Please give us some idea of how you might handle these projects.

- In your judgment, what are the most important functions of the superintendent? Describe your experiences in handling each of these functions.

- Give us some idea of how you judge your own effectiveness as a superintendent. How would you expect the board to evaluate your work?

- A superintendent is expected to handle a variety of responsibilities. Which one do you feel most qualified to handle? Why? With which one are you least comfortable? Why?

- What have you done to upgrade the educational programs in schools under your supervision? How have you evaluated the results?

- What kinds of staff development programs have you been involved in?

- What kind of understanding would you hope to establish between the board and yourself in order to administer this district effectively?

- Describe your background in budget preparation and business administration.

- How have you been involved in collective bargaining?

- How should the public be involved in school-related matters?

- What educational programs at the state and

federal levels do you consider most significant at this time?

- How do you use your spare time?

Staff Involvement

Staff members might also be involved in the interview process. Although such involvement is not widespread, it has proven satisfactory in some instances, especially in smaller school districts where the relationship between board and staff is a close one.

Yet, such involvement should be undertaken only with the full realization that the board alone will make the final decision.

Staff involvement in the interview process can be accomplished in the following way:

The teacher and/or administrator associations name representatives to meet informally with the board and individual candidates for the superintendent's job. Together, they discuss school district issues with the candidates. Then participants communicate their thoughts, in writing, to the board, stating what they perceive to be the strengths and weaknesses of each candidate.

This input then is used by the board in making its final determination.

The determination should be made by the board as a whole. While screening committees can be used to sort out the credentials of applicants and suggest a list of top candidates, the final selection process should not be delegated by the board to anyone else even to a committee of the board. The selection of a new superintendent always should be the responsibility of the entire board.

Visiting the Home Community

Following the interview process, some boards feel it is advisable to visit the home community of the leading candidate.

Board members will have developed their own impressions from the interview. But the fact is that some candidates are more skilled at the interview process than others. A person skilled at being interviewed can project a better image than his or her work record warrants, and vice versa. Thus, an option the board might wish to explore is a visit to the top candidate's community to see how he or she is regarded back home.

Such a visit can be undertaken by the full board or by a committee of the board. It should not be undertaken, however, without seeking the approval of the prospective superintendent.

This courtesy helps avoid the embarrassment of visiting the community only to find that the candidate wished to keep the consideration confidential.

If the candidate and the board agree on a visit to the community, the prospective superintendent should inform his or her own board of the impending visit.

The board, or a committee of the board, should talk with board members in the prospective superintendent's community, with staff, community leaders, parents, the clergy, people in the street, the chamber of commerce, service club officers, political leaders, the media, possibly even the superintendent's family.

Make a Choice

Reach consensus at an executive session where the pluses and minuses of each leading candidate can be discussed extensively in a rational, unhur-

rial and objective manner. Your vote will take place in public session.

If necessary, invite the one or two most promising candidates back for a final interview, to clarify any doubts that may remain in the minds of board members.

Even if there is only one major candidate remaining, the board may wish to have that person return to meet staff members, talk with the incumbent superintendent and visit the community.

Some boards also require a physical examination for the leading candidate, although most boards merely require a statement from the candidate on the state of his or her health. Sometimes a yearly physical checkup is part of the superintendent's compensation package.

Only when the final decision is made by the entire board is there substantial groundwork for continuing compatibility. The selection should be unanimous. This gives promise of harmonious relationships between the board and the superintendent. It buttresses the confidence of the community in the board, the new superintendent and the school district as a whole.

Prepare a Contract

Once the choice is made, the job should be offered, by telephone and in writing, contingent on contract agreement. The contract should be agreed upon by both the superintendent and the board before any announcement is made. The board, and the superintendent, each should use legal counsel to draw up and review the proposed contract to make sure it meets all state requirements, accurately sets forth conditions of employment, salary, fringe benefits and duties,

and contains procedures for evaluation and contract renewal.

Some contracts also deal with such items as tax-sheltered annuities, moving expenses, housing, transportation and other expenses.

Dealing with a Turndown

Be prepared for a turndown. It is not probable, but it is possible. There is always a chance that your first choice will get cold feet, or receive a better offer from his or her present employer.

There is only one thing to do if you get a turndown. Go to your second choice immediately. Chances are that there is only a slim difference between the two choices. As a matter of fact, if a search is thorough, the top three or four candidates will be excellent. Thus, there usually is no problem in going to your second, or even your third choice to find a capable chief executive.

The key, however, is to act with dispatch. If your first choice says "no," and you dally before going to your second choice, you may find yourself without a top candidate still willing to take the job.

Announcing Your Selection

Make an announcement. Coordinate the time and date of the announcement with the superintendent and his or her present board. Also coordinate the content of your announcement with the new superintendent. (See sample news release, Chapter 8.)

Try to make the announcement simultaneously to the school district's many publics. For larger districts with media coverage by daily newspapers, radio and television, a news conference should be considered. Key community leaders,

officers of parent groups and staff associations and student government officers should be invited.

For smaller districts, the announcement may be made at a meeting of the school board or at a specially called meeting to which staff, students, parents and community leaders are invited.

The announcement should be positive revealing the qualifications and background of the new superintendent and stating the board's confidence in his or her ability to move the system ahead.

Yet the announcement should not be an overstatement. Don't announce that you have hired the "best" superintendent in the nation. You haven't, no matter how good the person might be.

Don't promise miraculous solutions to problems that beset the district. If the former superintendent and the current board couldn't solve them after trying for several years, then the new superintendent isn't going to work miracles overnight. To imply it is unfair and untrue.

Project confidence and optimism, be positive. The public's first impressions of a new superintendent will go a long way toward helping the executive through the first critical days and months on the job.

Clear the File

A final task in the selection process is to notify unsuccessful candidates that a new superintendent has been hired, and then destroy all candidate materials. These are essential steps in assuring confidentiality for all candidates.

These steps are particularly essential in cases

where a superintendent in one district has applied for a superintendency in another without informing his or her current board.

If a candidate does not get the job and his or her candidacy is revealed, it could be personally and professionally damaging. That is particularly true if the reasons for seeking the new job are misconstrued as dissatisfaction with the person's current position.

Chapter 4

EXPECTATIONS:

What Should the Board Expect?

There have been many words used to describe the ideal qualities of a superintendent of schools.

Among them are spirit, courage, vision, dedication, commitment, creativity, enterprise, statesmanship, imagination, experience, knowledge, sensitivity, humanitarianism, understanding, trust, patience, decisiveness.

But there are other important qualities. Some are intangible. The successful superintendent must be able to deal with the myriad of forces and pressures that affect schools today. The superintendent must have the ability to comprehend those forces and to deal with them quickly and effectively. The successful superintendent must also realize the implications of those forces.

An ideal superintendent should have a ready grasp of administrative structure, organization, instruction, business, personnel administration, communication and public relations, planning and politics.

He or she should be a leader who is able to energize the resources of the district and give direction to the enterprise within the policy framework established by the school board.

The superintendent must be devoted to public education, which he or she has been educated to understand, organize and administer in ways likely to achieve the specific goals of the school district.

A successful superintendent has allegiance to an ideal and a loyalty to goals of the profession that go beyond a contractual relationship with the board.

The successful superintendent is committed to personal performance and professional responsibility and is dedicated to the educational well-being of children, youth and adults that transcends all other considerations.

Boards that fully recognize the importance of these professional ideals attract devoted and able professional employees. As a result they obtain the type of service that assures a strong school system. These, then, are some of the ideals a school board should seek in a superintendent.

Basic Functions

There are also some basic functions of the superintendency that must be considered, functions that are an integral part of the work of every superintendent regardless of the type, size or complexity of the school system.

Planning and evaluation skills underlie the entire complex. Organization establishes a framework. Personnel, business and buildings establish the necessary operating conditions for the educational process.

Communication provides a two-way sharing of knowledge and ideas with both the public and the school staff. Coordination binds all together so that manpower and materials of the school system may be focused on the larger function of instruction. A good superintendent of schools must be competent in all these areas.

Personal Knowledge

Yet beyond ideals, basic functions and necessary qualifications, the accumulation of personal knowledge on the part of the prospective

superintendent also will weigh heavily in his or her future success or failure.

The superintendent should have knowledge of:

- Classroom and laboratory environments, tools for teaching and structural organization for the deployment of staff and students.
- What science and research show about the expectations, drives, fears, interests and personal diversities that exist within groups of teachers, parents and youth.
- The public and what makes the public tick, including: what it is; what its dynamics are; how it is organized; who leads it; where the power lies; how it makes itself felt; and how to work with it instead of against it.
- The constantly changing needs of a school district and the society it serves.
- How to plan wisely for the future.

All these criteria should be used in evaluating a prospective superintendent.

Duties of the New Superintendent

What about the superintendent's duties after he or she is chosen? What should the board expect the superintendent to do?

The board should be prepared to state what it expects in a superintendent of schools. The following are reasonable expectations:

- A school board should expect its superintendent to serve as its chief executive officer.
- A board should expect its superintendent to be its professional adviser in all matters and to recommend appropriate school policies for its consideration.

- A board should expect its superintendent to implement and execute board policy.
- A board should expect its superintendent to keep it fully and accurately informed about the school program.
- A board should expect its superintendent to interpret the needs of the school system.
- A board should expect its superintendent to present his professional recommendations on all problems and issues for board consideration.
- A board should expect its superintendent to devote a great share of thought and time to the improvement of instruction.
- A board should expect its superintendent to be alert to advances and improvements in educational programs, wherever they may be found.
- A board should expect its superintendent to lead in the development and operation of an adequate program of school community relations.
- A board should expect its superintendent to participate in community activities.
- A board should expect its superintendent to use great care in nominating candidates for appointment to the school staff.
- A board should expect its superintendent to recommend for purchase equipment, books, and supplies that are appropriate to the purposes and needs of the school system.
- A board should expect its superintendent to present for its consideration an annual budget that is designed to serve the needs of the school system.

- The board should expect its superintendent to establish and oversee the financial operations of the school district to ensure adherence to budget provisions and the wise use of school funds.

- A board should expect its superintendent to be a skilled politician in order to work effectively with his or her many publics.

Yet each school district, each board, has its own specific needs, its own specific knowledge of the situation at hand, its own basic list of intangibles it is seeking in a superintendent of schools. These local needs must be applied to the search or the entire quest for a new superintendent may be a futile one.

Chapter 5

EXPECTATIONS:

What Should the Superintendent Expect?

Just as school boards have expectations of their prospective superintendents, superintendents have expectations of their prospective school boards.

Perhaps the most important expectations of a prospective superintendent are a sense of security; a unanimity of purpose on the part of the board to have faith in the superintendent's administrative ability; and assurance of a close working relationship unhindered by board intrusion into the day-to-day operation of the schools.

It's not an easy situation. Intangibles are involved. In the interview process, a perceptive candidate will sense the mood of the board, its stature, its bearing, its demeanor, its self assurance, its unity or its fragmentation.

If a prospective superintendent detects positive feelings on the part of the board he or she will take a more confident step up the career ladder.

Board Responsibilities

The board has some specific responsibilities it must guarantee if it hopes to attract a top-flight candidate.

Among them are:

- To write clear and concise statements of policy indicating what is expected of the superintendent in terms of job performance.

- To assist the superintendent with counsel and advice, giving of its judgement, business experi-

ence, and familiarity with the local school system and community; also, to consult with the superintendent on all school system matters the board is considering or proposing.

- To delegate to the superintendent responsibility for all executive functions, to refrain from handling directly any administrative details, and to give the superintendent authority commensurate with his or her responsibilities.

- To make all employees of the school system responsible to the superintendent, to refrain from any direct dealings with any of them, and to require and receive all reports from them through the superintendent.

- To refer all applications, complaints, and other communications, oral or written, to the superintendent, except when they come to the board on appeal from decisions of the superintendent.

- To provide adequate safeguards for the superintendent and other personnel that will allow them to perform their proper functions on a professional basis. These safeguards involve, particularly, supporting the superintendent in his efforts to protect the personnel and the schools from individuals and organizations seeking to exploit the schools for selfish reasons.

- To support the superintendent in all decisions and actions that conform to proper professional standards and the announced policy of the board, and to accept full responsibility for administrative acts authorized by, or resulting from, the policies of the board.

- To hold the superintendent strictly responsible for the administration of the schools, to require him to keep the board fully informed at all

times (through both written and oral reports), to review and appraise the results of his work, and to inform the superintendent when any methods or procedures do not meet with the approval of the board.

- If, after fair and impartial appraisal and due admonishment, the board is convinced that the superintendent's services do not meet with its approval, to notify him or her as far in advance as possible, in accordance with board policy and the legal requirements of the state, that a change must be made.

If a board has the unity of purpose and the self assurance to make these commitments to a prospective superintendent, odds are that the board will wind up with a successful chief executive.

Chapter 6

RETAINING THE SUPERINTENDENT

A school board's responsibilities do not end with the successful recruitment, selection and hiring of a new superintendent of schools. That is only a part of the job. An equally important part is retaining that superintendent for the benefit of the students and the public.

The only way that task can be accomplished is by establishing close, effective and lasting relationships between the superintendent and his or her board.

Simply put, a system must be devised to allow the board and the superintendent to discharge their proper functions without infringing on each other's responsibilities. But that, experience shows, is more easily said than done.

Avoiding Problems

Avoiding problems in board-superintendent relationships involves certain "givens":

- The role and function of a school board and superintendent must be mutually understood. Each local school board should develop written policies regarding the role of the board and the superintendent. These policies should include expectations of both parties, goals and evaluative procedures.

- The concept of effective school management must be the mutual objective of the school board and the superintendent. It is imperative that the board, through its superintendent, foster a management team concept. It is necessary to have written policies defining the roles of the board, the superintendent and the supervisory staff of the school district. Inherent in this

process must be the ability of each group to understand its individual and collective roles. Paramount is the requirement to communicate, openly and candidly, with each other, the school staff and the community.

• Because change is inevitable, a board and a superintendent must constantly assess the way they work together in the face of change. Both must be flexible. There must be a willingness to properly divide responsibility. Change brings both progress and problems to the school district. The assessment process must take place in a climate of trust and understanding.

Unfortunately, trust and confidence often break down under pressures facing school boards and superintendents today. Conflicts arise and are fanned by the flames of community pressure. Superintendents question board policy, and boards get involved in administrative matters. Disorder feeds upon itself.

With proper planning, these problems can be avoided.

Boards must have policies to guide them through hard times to keep them out of the day-to-day administration of the district and away from strained board-superintendent relationships. A lack of policy direction breeds indecision and crises.

Yet, just as the board has the obligation to let the superintendent handle the day-to-day operation of the schools, the superintendent has an equally important responsibility: keeping the board informed. Perhaps no other act is more detrimental to board-superintendent relationships than failing to maintain constant communication with the entire board.

A superintendent must be able to disclose everything to the board, to outline problems and their causes, to engage in open discussion with the board about these problems, to recommend solutions, and to live by final board policy on those matters.

Only through open communication can a superintendent properly serve his or her board and gain its respect.

Policies—A Key

Policy development is the key.

Boards should develop policies concerning the roles of both the superintendent and the board. Policies should clearly define the differences between policy and administrative functions. Policies should specify the superintendent's obligation to keep the board informed. Policies should spell out, in writing, rules and regulations for school district governance and for school board operation.

Policy should be constantly reviewed and updated. It should be readily accessible to the board, superintendent, staff, students and the public.

Building a school district without written policy is like building a house without a blueprint. The house can be built but the structure more than likely will be unstable. Before long, it just might fall in.

Policy should clearly define the role of management.

The board should adopt a table of organization, with line-staff relationships, descriptions of the responsibilities of each administrative position and evaluative criteria for assessing administrative performance.

Board policy also should spell out provisions for management training programs appropriate for various levels of responsibility. It should specify the management goals and priorities of the school district.

Perhaps most important, policy should contain provisions both for assessing the performance of the superintendent and for self-evaluation of the board. No one is above policy direction, not even the policy makers.

Policy also should involve mandates for communication, both internal and external, on the part of the superintendent and the board.

Policy should assure open, honest communication, internally and externally, through board meetings, other meetings, publications, the news media, memos, annual reports, community forums, and other channels.

Policy should spell out both board and administrative duties to be responsive to public inquiry, to operate within the letter and the spirit of open meetings laws, and to be receptive to feedback from the many publics served by the board.

Policy should leave no doubt that communication is a two-way street, whether between the superintendent and the board or the school district and the public.

Policy must deal with the curricular thrust of the school district. It should spell out the balance of emphasis on basic skills and educational alternatives. It should deal with academic achievement, with job skills, with extracurricular activities.

Policy also should deal extensively with students, their rights and responsibilities, their

educational requirements, and their social development.

The point is . . . policy is the key to order and understanding, to dealing with problems as well as educational progress. Policy means structure. It means spelling out what is expected of students and staff, of the superintendent, and of the board itself.

Within this structure, mutual respect and understanding between a board and superintendent can flourish. A unity of purpose can be demonstrated to pupils, parents and the public alike.

A board with sound policies can attract, hire and retain a competent person to administer its schools and to properly educate students.

Chapter 7

RECIPE AND TIME LINE

Plan Three to Six Months for Entire Process

- Appoint an acting superintendent, if the position is vacant, to carry out the functions of the district and the school board.
- Take a long, hard look at the priorities of the school system. Determine what changes must be made and the type of new superintendent who can best make them.
- Develop criteria for the selection of a new superintendent based upon your assessment of the district's needs.
- Decide whether to recruit from within, outside, or a combination of both.
- Decide whether to hire a consultant.
- Decide whether to use a community advisory committee.
- Decide whether to involve students and staff.
- Decide whether to conduct the search through a board committee or through a committee of the whole.
- Decide whether to employ a screening committee to sort through initial applications.
- Decide on a policy statement concerning board-superintendent relations to govern your working relationships with the new superintendent.
- Decide on procedures to evaluate the candidates.

- Set a strict time line.
- Develop a budget.
- Develop a media communication plan.

Recruit
two to three months

- Announce the vacancy and solicit applicants.
- Develop a screening committee, if necessary.
- Receive a screening committee (or board committee) report on applications.

Select
two to four months

- Review screening committee (or board committee) report.
- Determine pre-interview strategy—questions to be asked, final evaluative procedures, time and place of interviews, etc.
- Conduct interviews.
- Visit home communities of final candidates, if necessary.
- Make a choice.
- Prepare a contract.
- Be prepared to go to your second choice, if necessary.
- Announce the selection of a new superintendent.

Chapter 8

SAMPLE NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release:

The Upper Marlboro Board of Education announced today the appointment of Dr. Joseph G. Upchurch as Superintendent of Schools.

Harison F. Smith, president of the Board of Educarion, called Dr. Upchurch an "outstanding administrator, educator and leader of youth" in announcing his appointment to a three-year term as superintendent.

Dr. Upchurch has been superintendent of schools in East Whiteland, Ohio, for the past five years.

He replaces Dr. Homer P. Floyd, who has retired after 14 years as superintendent in Upper Marlboro.

Smith praised Dr. Floyd for his "service above and beyond the call of duty to the school children of Upper Marlboro" and for his "14 years of dedication to the cause of educational excellence in this community."

The board president said that Upper Marlboro was "extremely fortunate to obtain a man of Dr. Upchurch's reputation and ability" to replace Dr. Floyd.

He said that the school district's achievement test scores were far above national averages, and that new discipline procedures instituted by the superintendent led to vastly diminished problems of truancy and vandalism in the East Whiteland Schools.

Smith said that Dr. Upchurch was selected by the board of education after an extensive search conducted by the board with the assistance of Dr. Randolph Jennings, Chairman of the Department of Education at Upland State University.

"With the help of Dr. Jennings, we searched extensively and systematically," Smith said, "and we are confident that we have obtained the very finest educator available."

Smith said community leaders, parents, students and school district staff had been given an opportunity to express their preferences for the qualities of a new superintendent, and "we believe that in Dr. Upchurch we have found the person who best meets the desires expressed by the Upper Marlboro Community."

The board president said Dr. Upchurch will take over as superintendent on July 1 at a salary of $44,000 a year, an increase of $4,000 over the salary paid Dr. Floyd. Salary increases during the second and third years of Dr. Upchurch's contract, Smith said, will depend upon board review of the superintendent's accomplishments and upon increases in the cost of living.

Smith said that formal ratification by the board of the new superintendent's contract will take place at the next regularly scheduled board meeting at 7 p.m. on May 14 in the auditorium of Upper Marlboro High School, and that Dr. Upchurch will meet with interested members of the community in the high school cafeteria immediately following the meeting.

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